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AUTHOR Cretser, Gary A.; Leon, Joseph J.
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ABSTRACT

The study examined the economic, social structural, and social psychological indicators of quality of life (QOL) in the United States. QOL can be defined for any individual as that set of conditions which after being met makes the individual happy or satisfied. It is a subjective concept. Data for the study were taken from 1099 responses to the 1975 General Social Survey conducted by National Opinion Research Center. Initially, stepwise multiple regression analysis was used. Findings indicated that eight variables (two as indicators of economic and social structure, two as indicators of social integration, and four as indicators of social psychological level) of a larger set of variables were predictive and related to subjective QOL. These included educational attainment of respondent; marital status; frequency of attendance of religious services; and satisfaction with family, work, finances, and health. When the eight variables were used in a path analysis, it was found that satisfaction with job and finances are the best direct predictors of happiness. The author concludes that more research is needed in the areas of cultural expectations and satisfactions as they relate to QOL. (Author/AV)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS"

INDICATORS OF QUALITY OF LIFE...
SELECTED ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES

by

Gary A. Cretser and Joseph J. Leon
Behavioral Science Department
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

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This paper is an exploratory attempt to develop an analytic framework to establish a set of indicators of subjective Quality of Life in America. It is hoped that knowing what makes individuals happy in society can be used by individuals to influence the quality of their life and improve the general social well-being.

Quality of Life (QOL) can be defined for any individual as that set of conditions which after being met makes the individual happy or satisfied. QOL defined in this manner can vary from one individual to another and from place to place over time. QOL may also be defined through the use of social indicators (e.g., GNP, health and welfare indicators).

Recently, Liu (1975:3) defined QOL as an output of two general aggregate factors: physical and spiritual. Physical factors include quantifiable goods, services, material wealth, etc.; while spiritual includes many of the psychological, sociological, and anthropological factors. According to Liu (1975:3) most spiritual inputs are not quantifiable at present; therefore in his operational definition, QOL is defined at a particular point of time as a positive function of those social, economic, political, and environmental inputs which are quantifiable.

Liu conducted research aimed at developing indices to compare quality of life between the various United States. Using nine QOL component indicators, Liu found for 1970 data, that there were six 'excellent' states - (Calif., Ark., Ky., Lo., Miss., N. Car., S. Car., Tenn., Vir., and W. Virg.). His findings with respect to the ten lowest states were comparable to Smith (1973), Wilson (1967) and Lifestyle Magazine (1972). However, the findings for the

best ten states showed considerable differences.

Liu's findings suggest that some states have a better QOL than others. It is our contention that his technology index and agriculture index, etc. are interesting and informative, but needless to say, are relative to the needs and desires of individuals in the American society.

This position is taken by Campbell (1972, 1976). He is concerned with the quality of personal experiences, satisfactions, etc. that people have in the society. That is, QOL must be in the eye of the beholder. Land (1975) in his discussion of the social indicator movement acknowledges Campbell and Converse (1972) for their substantial impact on that movement. This impact came in the form of sensitizing social indicator researchers to the need to measure subjective perceptions of QOL.

It is with this backdrop of on-going debate that this paper is presented. It is not the intent here to assess the social indicators movement or the Quality of Life movement nor to argue that objective variables are more fruitful than subjective variables, but rather to analyze the economic, social structural and social psychological indicators of Quality of Life.

It is hypothesized that one's happiness is a function of: (a) his economic and social structural position in society, (b) his degree of social integration and (c) his level of satisfaction in several areas. It is assumed that value systems and value orientations form the basis and interact with the social and economic structure. Current value orientations include marriage, achievement and success (often evidenced by level of education, and income), and belonging. Individuals through the process of cultural conditioning (socialization) learn the value system and social structure and mechanisms of social integration and attempt to make their lives conform. When the individual's life appears to have conformed in a particular area, he judges himself to be satisfied, and satisfaction in several areas may lead to

a general feeling of happiness.

It is noted that recent work by Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) used "satisfaction" rather than "happiness" as the measure of QOL. They argued that "happiness" often is used as a synonym for satisfaction, but nevertheless it does have quite a variety of other meanings. "Happiness" may conote gaiety or elation - a short term mood - a feeling, while satisfaction is a judgmental or cognitive experience.

In this study "happiness" is operationalized by the question, "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days -- would you say you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" QOL used in this fashion is of the subjective perception variety. One measure of the economic dimension is used. The measure used represents the total family income. Four social structural measures are used to indicate respondent's position. The measures are educational level, occupational prestige, age, and sex. Six measures are used to operationalize social integration. They are marriage, religious attendance (any religion), how often the respondent interacts with neighbors, friends, relatives, and number of organizations to which the respondent belongs. To tap the social psychological area, 8 indicators of satisfaction are delineated. These indicators are satisfaction with job, family, friends, health, finances, leisure, residential area and one other social psychological indicator that of perception of family income compared to American families in general.

The data for the study are taken from the 1975 General Social Survey conducted by National Opinion Research Center. The universe sampled is the total noninstitutionalized population of the continental United States, 18 years of age and older. There were a total of 1,490 completed interviews. The analysis excludes all respondents who did not give complete information on any of the variables used. The total number in the study is 1,099

complete cases.

Before discussing the results it is interesting to note that over the last 18 years, samples of Americans have been asked about their happiness. Table 1 shows that only a small percent of Americans have been "not too happy" and over the last 18 year period most Americans say that they are "pretty happy".

The findings may at first glance appear to be incongruent with the objective physical indexes used in this country which have changed significantly over this period. That is the GNP has grown, the level of average income has increased, health conditions have improved, technology has advanced yet the percent saying they are "pretty happy" has remained rather constant. This may be explained by the continual adjustments made between achievements and expectations by the individuals in American society. It is with this knowledge of the state of reported of happiness in America that we proceed to our analysis and results.

To test our hypothesis, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was used. The variables were categorized into economic/social structural, social integration, and social psychological. Using this categorization, three separate stepwise regressions were performed.

Table 2 shows that of the economic and social structural indicators, educational attainment of respondent is the best predictor of happiness. The relationship between education and happiness is such that respondents with higher levels of education reported being happier. Income, Age, Occupational Prestige, and Sex of respondent explained little of the remaining variance in the data. The finding with regards to age is somewhat surprising. Previous research by Campbell (1976) and others have found a significant difference, i.e., they found that as age increased, happiness decreased.

Table 3 shows the results of social integration indicators. More of the variance in the data is explained. Marital status and frequency of attendance of religious services are the two best predictors.[1] The correlation between happiness and marital status indicates "married" respondents more often reported being "very happy" or "pretty happy" as compared to those "not married". Also, greater frequency of attendance of religious services is associated with being "very happy", while frequency of interaction with friends, relatives, community, and the number of organizations to which one belongs (all varieties) show little predictive value.

The findings in Table 4 demonstrate that overall the satisfaction variables are more predictive of happiness than the economic social structural and social integration variables. Of the satisfaction variables, satisfaction with family, work, finances, and health are the best indicators of happiness. As one would expect, each of these satisfaction variables was positively associated with reported happiness. Individuals reporting higher levels of satisfaction also tended to express greater happiness.

Given all the indicators used for each variable operationalized, the above findings give limited support to the hypothesis. The results do give indication that some of the variables in the three separate stepwise multiple regressions are able to explain a portion of the variance in happiness. An analysis of a correlation matrix of all the variables included thus far in the analysis and the above results lead us to select a smaller subset of the variables with which to build a predictive model for QOL for additional investigation and future testing.

Eight predictor variables were selected. Two were used as indicators of the economic and social structural level, 2 as indicators of the social

integration level, and 4 as indicators at social psychological level. The order of the variables was fixed such that the economic and social structural effect the social integration which in turn effect the social psychological which in turn effect happiness, directly and indirectly.

A path analysis derived from several multiple regressions was employed. Table 5 shows the direct and indirect effects of all the variables used in the path analysis. The variables in the path analysis that have beta's of .06 and higher (statistically significant beta's) are displayed in Figure 1. The significant paths indicate that satisfaction with job and finances are the best direct predictors of happiness. Being married influences both satisfaction with family and happiness. Satisfaction with health is also positively related to happiness. Income is somewhat predictive of satisfaction with finances and job.

It appears that economic, social structural and social psychological factors are predictive of QOL subjectively defined. However, the amount of variance explained is small.

Our findings may be compared with some of the findings of Campbell et al (1976). They used an Index of Well Being as their global measure and found that satisfaction with spare time activities explained the greatest amount of variance in well being. This variable was followed by satisfaction with family life, satisfaction with standard of living, satisfaction with work and satisfaction with marriage. Satisfaction with friendships ranked seventh, education tenth, neighborhood eleventh, health fourteenth, religion fifteenth and organizations seventeenth. In the present study the variable satisfaction with leisure activities, contrary to Campbell, was found to be of little predictive value. Although the simple correlation with happiness was .21, when it was combined with other satisfaction variables, its independent contribution was small. Satisfaction with job,

satisfaction with finances, satisfaction with health, marital status, and satisfaction with family were the most important variables in the present study for predicting happiness.

In sum, satisfaction in these areas, regardless of the objective indicators, except for marital status and level of education attained, was most salient to individuals in achieving happiness. It appears more research should be done in the areas of cultural expectations and satisfactions as they relate to quality of life, so that understanding and predictability can be improved.

TABLE 1

TRENDS IN REPORTED LEVELS OF HAPPINESS OVER SELECTED STUDIES 1957:1975

YEAR	VERY HAPPY	PRETTY HAPPY	NOT TO HAPPY	TOTAL	N
1957 - Nationwide probability sample [a]	35%	54%	11%	100%	2460
1963 - Nationwide quota sample [b]	32%	52%	16%	100%	1501
1965 - Nationwide quota sample [c]	30%	53%	17%	100%	1469
1971 - Nationwide probability sample [d]	29%	61%	10%	100%	2147
1972 - Spring Nationwide probability sample [e]	26%	65%	9%	100%	1254
1972 - Fall Nationwide probability sample [e]	22%	68%	10%	100%	947
1973 - NORC - General Social Survey	36% (538)	57% (766)	13% (196)	100%	1500
1974 - NORC - General Social Survey	37% (561)	49% (725)	14% (194)	100%	1480
1975 - NORC - General Social Survey	33% (488)	54% (803)	13% (194)	100%	1485

a. Gurin, Veroff, and Feld, 1960
b. NORC Study SRS 120; cf Bradburn (1969), p. 40
c. Bradburn (1969), p. 45
d. Campbell, Converse, Rodgers (1976), p. 26
e. SRC unpublished data; cf Campbell et al (1976), p. 26

TABLE 2

PREDICTION OF HAPPINESS BY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURAL VARIABLES
(Stepwise Regression)

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURAL VARIABLES	BETA COEFFICIENTS				
	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5
Level of education	.12*	.11*	.12*	.11*	.11*
Family income (1974)		-.05	.05	.05	.05
Age			.04	.04	.04
Occupational prestige				.03	.03
Sex					-.02
Explained Variance (Adjusted multiple R^2)	.01	.02	.02	.02	.02

*P $\leq$ .01

TABLE 3

PREDICTION OF HAPPINESS BY SOCIAL INTEGRATION VARIABLES
(Stepwise Regression)

	BETA COEFFICIENTS					
SOCIAL INTEGRATION VARIABLES	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6
Marital status	.19*	.18*	.18*	.18*	.19*	.19*
Religious attendance		.17*	.15*	.16*	.16*	.16*
Organization membership			.09*	.08*	.08*	.08*
Frequency of interaction with friends				-.07*	-.06*	-.06*
Frequency of interaction with neighbors					-.04	-.04
Frequency of interaction with relatives						-.01
Explained Variance (Adjusted multiple R^2)	.04	.06	.07	.07	.08	.07

*$P \leq .01$

TABLE 4

PREDICTION OF HAPPINESS BY SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES
(Stepwise Regression)

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES	BETA COEFFICIENTS							
	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6	STEP 7	STEP 8
Satisfaction with family life	.28*	.24*	.23*	.19*	.17*	.16*	.16*	.16*
Satisfaction with work		.24*	.20*	.19*	.19*	.18*	.18*	.17*
Satisfaction with financial situation			.17*	.16*	.16*	.16*	.16*	.14*
Satisfaction with health and physical condition				.15*	.14*	.12*	.12*	.12*
Satisfaction with leisure activities					.10*	.09*	.08*	.08*
Satisfaction with friendships						.06*	.05*	.06*
Satisfaction with residential area							.05	.05
Relation of family income to average								-.04
Explained Variance (Adjusted multiple R^2)	.08	.13	.16	.18	.19	.19	.19	.19

*$P \leq .01$

TABLE 5

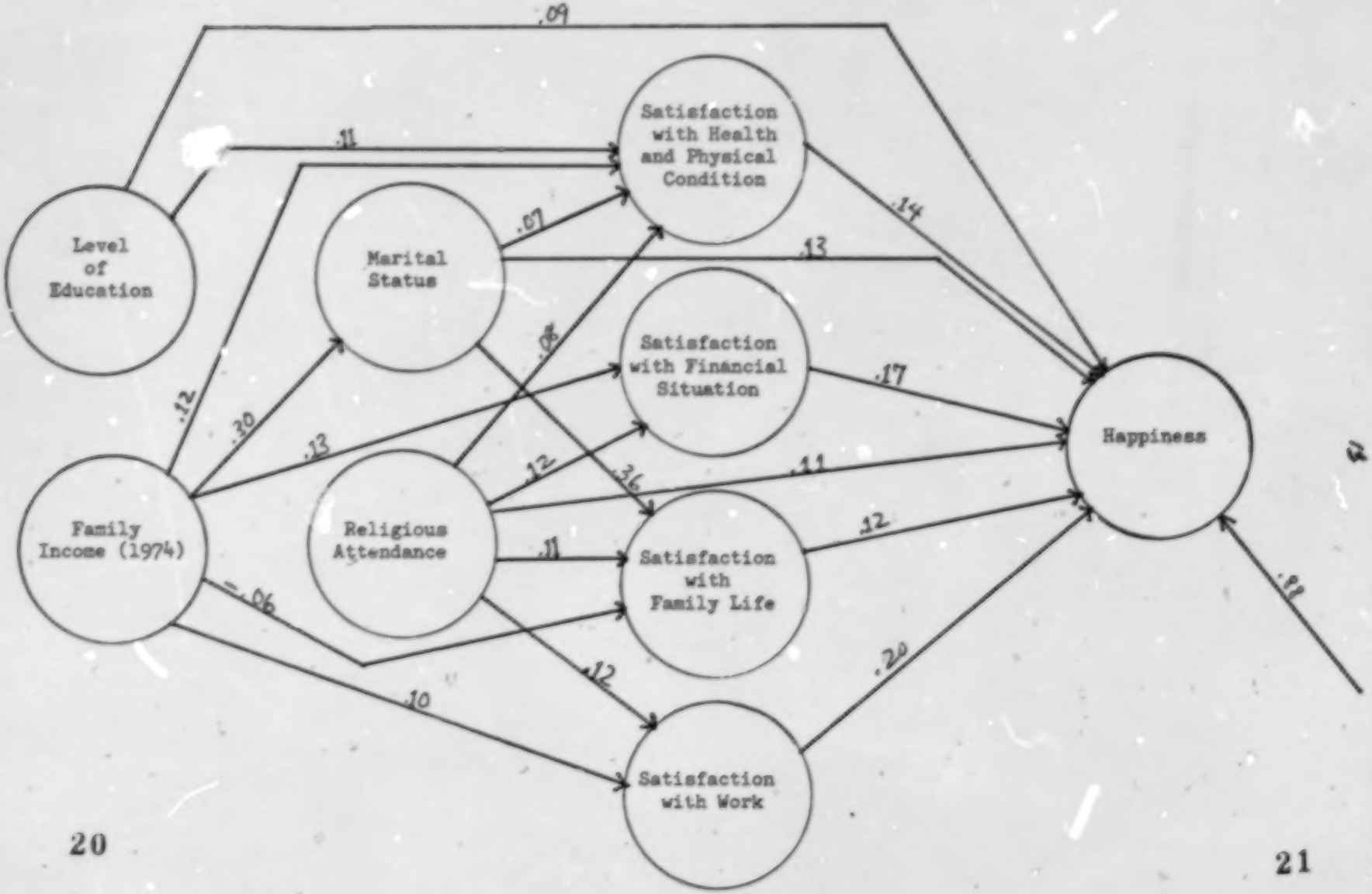
PREDICTION OF HAPPINESS BY ECONOMIC-SOCIAL STRUCTURAL, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES

	BETA COEFFICIENTS						
	MARITAL STATUS	RELIGIOUS ATTEND.	SAT. WITH FAM. LIFE	SAT. WITH WORK	SAT. WITH FIN. SIT.	SAT. WITH HEALTH	HAPPINESS
Level of education	-.05	.02	.03	.01	.05	.11*	.09*
Family income (1974)	.30*	.05	-.06*	.10*	.13*	.12*	.04
Marital status			.36*	.02	.01	.07*	.13*
Religious attendance			.11*	.12*	.12*	.08*	.11*
Satisfaction with family life							.12*
Satisfaction with work							.20*
Satisfaction with financial situation							.17*
Satisfaction with health and physical condition							.14*
Explained Variance (Adjusted multiple R^2)	.08	.00	.13	.02	.03	.04	.22

*$P \leq .01$

FIGURE 1

SIGNIFICANT PATHS TO HAPPINESS



FOOTNOTES

[1] Marital Status was dichotomized into categories of married and not married. Divorced, separated, widowed are considered non-married.

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